From Lord Avebury

House of Lords · Westminster

1981 March 10

Dear Mr Azzam

Thank you for your letter of March 6 and the enclosed text of the charges which have been brought against Professor Dr. Necmettin Erbakan and others. I am forwarding this document to Amnesty International, who may well have experts capable of reading Turkish and who would certainly be interested to know what is the nature of the charges. I very much look forward to receiving from you the English translation which you kindly promise and this could be the basis for the further action which you suggest, both in the Inter-Parliamentary Union and elsewhere.

With regard to the thousands of persons who are said to be held in military and other prisons, the more names and details you can obtain, particularly of the political detainees, the better. Obviously persons have been taken into custody for suspected offences of violence, and if they are properly charged under the law in due course, this would be entirely a matter for the Turkish authorities themselves. If on the other hand, many of them are held as you say, for political reasons such as their religious beliefs or statements they have made in the past which were not contrary to the law at the time, then certainly organisations such as Amnesty International would like to know about it. I note the remarks of the Turkish president made in response to questions of European parliamentarians reported in the Daily News of Istanbul on February 28. I wonder if you happen to know whether any more comprehensive report of this meeting was prepared by the European parliamentarians and if so, whether it is to be published.

With regard to the charges against Professor Erbakan and his 32 parliamentary colleagues, in particular, I note that for the most part they concern speeches and statements made over the past several years, which were presumably quite lawful at the time they were made. I'm not sure whether Turkey is a signatory of the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights but if so, this matter should certainly be considered by the Sub-committee on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities when it next meets in Geneva. I will look into this matter and let you know what action I decide to take on it.

If you do get any further information, I very much look forward to hearing from you, and in the meanwhile I will let you know, what reaction I get from my colleagues to the suggestion you made of a parliamentary delegation to the attend the trials.

Yours sincerely

Eric Avebury

Mr. Salem Azzam, Secretary General
Islamic Council of Europe

4) The charges against Professor Erbakan and his 32 colleagues make no mention of any act of violation or political indiscipline or misuse of power or monetary embezzlement. They relate to his and his colleagues' disregard of secularism and Kamalism. It is one of the fundamental principles of natural justice, which has been enshrined in the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations and the European Commission for Human Rights that noone is to be persecuted for his right to believe. The charges against Professor Erbakan are based upon quotations given out of context from speeches and statements made over a number of years. In the way they have been quoted, they do not represent what was actually said by the speaker in the given context. Nonetheless, even if all the evidence is accepted, it does not amount to any act of violence or of violation of the rights of others. The charges boil down to the fact that those accused had dared to believe in certain things in accordance with their conscience and understanding and were not prepared to accept what certain others regarded to be the ideology of Kamalism. If these political leaders and intellectuals are to be persecuted for believing in something different from Kamalism, this would involve a gross violation of their human rights and of the basic principles of democracy.

5) It has also been authentically reported that a number of people have been dismissed from their positions only because they wore beards and were not prepared to shave them off. Similarly, a number of women teachers and students have been expelled from schools and colleges only because they were not prepared to forceably do away with their head-wear. It is a Muslim tradition that women cover their heads with a scarf. The military authorities are forcing them not to use the scarf and those who refuse are subjected to economic and political pressure.

I therefore take this opportunity to bring all these points to your notice and to request you to convey them to the IPU and other similar organs from where a voice can be raised for the protection of the rights of these people who are being persecuted for their political or religious beliefs.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

Salem Azzam
Secretary General